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DEMOCRATS SAY IRAN'CONTRA DEAL IS BIGGER SCANDAL THAN WATERGATE

BY ROBERT PARRY
WASHINGTON

A leading House Democrat on Saturday warned President Reagan that the Iran-Contra arms connection threatens a scandal "deeper and wider" than Watergate that can only be ended by stopping the war in Nicaragua.

"The Contra war is a cancer on this presidency," said Rep. David E. Bonior, D-Mich., recently chosen as a House chief deputy whip. "For five years, it has led your administration from one dirty deal to another." In the Democrats' weekly radio address, Bonior cited the CIA's mining of Nicaragua's harbors, the CIA "assassination" manual, the Contras' alleged links to drug trafficking, reports of atrocities and the disappearance of millions of dollars in "humanitarian" aid.

"More than a decade ago, the people of this nation suffered a scandal that paralyzed our government and forced a president to resign," said Bonior. "Watergate was horrible, but Mr. President, this scandal has deeper and wider ramifications for it touches on the power to declare war - the most awesome decision any leader or nation can make." The White House's secret arms sales to Iran came to light last month. Later in the month, the administration disclosed that up to \$30 million in payments from the sales were sent to the Contras for their war against Nicaragua's leftist government.

Reagan fired Lt. Col. Oliver L. North as a staff aide on the National Security Council for his role in diverting the money at a time when Congress banned U.S. military aid. North's boss, national security adviser John Poindexter, resigned.

Bonior noted that last week Reagan acknowledged "mistakes were made" in the operation and pledged to "set things right." But the Michigan Democrat said "more is required. ... I am asking you to put an end to the Contra war." Bonior said public opinion polls have shown consistent 2-1 opposition to Contra aid, a fact that led the administration to circumvent Congress to maintain support for the rebels.

"If the American people oppose the war, then the war would be run in secret out of the basement of the White House," Bonior said. "If Congress would not provide arms, then your agents would rather deal with (Iranian leader Ayatollah Ruhollah) Khomeini than accept the will of the American people."